CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This study employed Fairclough's (1995a) three dimensional framework to analyze the selected data. Fairclough's CDA framework was chosen for this study because the framework enables the researcher to analyze discourse at three levels i.e. discourse as texts, discourse as a discursive practice and discourse as a social practice (Fairclough 1995a: 96-97).

The data for this study was chosen from print advertisements published in the local English newspapers i.e. the *Star* and the *Sun*. They were selected because both contained many advertisements from slimming centres. Print advertisements featuring services provided by slimming centres were chosen for this study on the ground that they enable the researcher to analyze how the lexical items in the slimming advertisements construct the non-ideal and the ideal body image for women in Malaysia.

5.2 Research Findings

5.2.1 Quantitative Analysis

In the first part of my analyses, I have carried out a data frequency count on a total of 132 print advertisements based on a few pre-set categories such as body parts that are given special focus, negative words, positive words, and words with positive association. The frequency count reveals that *thighs, waist, hips, arms* and *tummy* are the body parts that are given prominence in the promotional texts analyzed.

Under the category of 'Negative Words that Describe the Body', it was demonstrated that negative lexicalization was more widely employed by the advertisers compared to positive lexicalization. This may be due to the purpose of the print advertisements that intends to draw women's attention to the negative body condition in the hope that they will be persuaded to sign up for the slimming programmes advertised. Among the frequently used negative lexical items are *fat/fats, fatty acids, flabby, fat cells, overweight, post-natal flabs* and *bulges*. The noun *problem* is the most widely used lexical items to describe the condition of women with a non-ideal body image.

Under the category of 'Positive Words that Describe the Body', it was found that the adjectives *slim* and *slimmer* rank the first followed by the adjective *contoured*. *Great*, *ideal* and *desired* are the most popularly used adjectives to describe female body shapes that meet the criteria of an ideal body. The data frequency count also revealed that the *thighs*, *waist*, *hips*, *arms* and *tummy* are the body parts that are given the most attention by the promotional texts.

Under the category of 'Words with Positive Association', the themes that are widely used by the promotional texts in association with the ideal body image are *beauty, confidence, health, success* and *achievement*.

5.2.2 Qualitative Analysis

In the second part of the analyses, the lexical items were analyzed according to the categories such as negative lexicalization, negative labeling, positive lexicalization and positive association. The lexical analyses enable the researcher to elucidate what is considered by the promotional texts as the non-ideal and the ideal body image for women and to unearth the ideological meaning for employing such words.

Negative lexicalization is a common strategy employed by the promotional texts to frame a proposition in a negative light. From the analyses, it was noted that negative lexicalization is employed quite extensively by the promotional texts in order to highlight the 'flaws' in a woman's body shape. Body shapes that do not fit into the category of the 'constructed ideal' are described using negative adjectives such as *overweight*, *extra* inches, *extra* pound, *excess* fat, *excess* weight, *excessive* fats and so forth. In order to magnify the imperfection in a woman's body, the promotional texts capitalized on negative lexicalization to illustrate the appearance and size of the various body parts. Some of the commonly used negative lexicalizations are as follows:

- Adjectives: *wide* hips, *huge* thighs, *big*-framed, *thick* waist, *bulging* tummy, *invisible* waistline, *pear-shaped*, *loose*, *flabby* and *saggy*
- Verbs: *slackened* and *sagging*

From the analyses, it was discovered that negative adverbs and adjectives are widely utilized to describe the body parts that have accumulated fat deposits. Examples of negative adjectives are *ugly*, *stubborn* and *unwanted* while the adverb that is popularly used is *unsightly*. The advertiser also increased the intensity of the negative adjectives by combining an adverb and an adjective e.g. *unsightly flabby* arms. The use of negative lexicalization in the promotional texts demonstrates that the advertisers are

propagating the ideology that ‘fat’ is a quality that is greatly despised by the society due to its lack of aesthetic value. Similarly, Jeffries (2007) points out that excess fat is described negatively using phrases with negative adjectives such as *baggy* folds; *baggy* skin; *loose* muscles; *slack* muscles and *loose* skin.

The promotional texts also do not give exception to women who have gone through pregnancy and child birth. Mothers are expected to maintain their pre-pregnancy figure. The examples of negative lexical items employed to describe the body shape of mothers are *post-natal weight problem, post-natal flab, pot belly, mommy bulges, cellulite, stretch marks, orange-peel* etc. Though it may sound unreasonable to expect mothers to maintain a pre-pregnancy figure, such ideology has become popular due to media construction. Likewise, the findings by other CDA scholars (Jeffries, 2007; Ng, 2005) also support the findings of this present research. Jeffries (2007) points out that in post-natal texts, the ideology of the unchanging body is reinforced where mothers are expected to regain their flat stomach after pregnancy. She also notes that in many of the pregnancy texts that she examines, the pre-pregnant body is regarded as normal while the post-pregnancy shape is considered as ‘abnormal’ and unacceptable. Ng (2005) also points out that regardless of whether a woman has given birth or otherwise, the slimming advertisements stress that the slim body shape is the ultimate goal that every woman should strive to achieve.

The data also reveals that the lexical item *problem* exists both as an adjective and a noun in the promotional texts. When it exists as a noun, it is for the purpose of describing ‘fat’ as a problem as in ‘overweight *problem*’ and ‘never-ending *problem*’. On the other hand, the word *problem* when used as an adjective, acts to describe the fat body parts negatively such as ‘*problem* zones’, ‘*problem* areas’ and ‘*problematic* areas’.

Whether used as a noun or an adjective, the word *problem* denotes a negative state where a solution is required. In this case, the advertisers are implying that 'fat' bodies need to be 'rectified' with a little assistance from the professional slimming experts.

In order to paint the state of being fat negatively, the promotional texts employed verbs such as *troubled, shunned* away, *hide, dread*; and nouns such as *challenges* and *difficulty* to describe the various circumstances encountered by women who were once fat. These words are incorporated in the voices of women who are celebrities, artistes and ordinary women recalling their past experiences when they were fat. Indeed, the promotional texts are sending the message that being fat can be a 'dark' moment in the lives of many women.

Findings from the data analyses reveal that the advertisers capitalized on negative labeling to describe women whose bodies are not in the ideal state. Some of the negative labeling found in the texts is *water buffalo, big truck, tanker, King Kong* and *"Auntie Fatty"*. Similarly, Albani's (2005) studies on print advertisements published in the Italian and American women's magazines demonstrate that plus-size bodies are constructed by print advertisements as disgusting and abhorrent while thin bodies are highly endorsed as the benchmark for ideal beauty.

The data analyses reveal that the print advertisements promote and endorse the 'slim' body shape as the ideal body image for women. It also demonstrates that the adjectives such as *slim/slimmer, slender, svelte, trim/trimmer* are the positively lexicalized adjectives employed by the advertisers to endorse the female body shapes that fall under the ideal category. The data also shows that an ideal body shape must also be *shapely* and *firm*. These requirements are demonstrated by the use of adjectives

such as *shapely/shapelier, curvaceous, contoured, firm/firmer, taut* and *tighter*. Therefore, the ideal body shapes constructed by the slimming advertisements are that of *slim, shapely* and *firm*. However, the researcher notes that the Malaysian women may not realize that the description of the ideal body shape is merely a construction by the society. Hence, many may want to achieve the constructed ideal because it is positively portrayed by the mass media. Correspondingly, Ng (2005) points out that under the discourse of 'slimness', slimming advertisements advocate various types of 'slimness' such as *tight, firm, taut, light* and *fat-free*. Ng (2005) also notes that having an hourglass figure, a smooth, youthful and radiant skin with a healthy and beautiful body shape are the criteria of beauty propagated by the slimming advertisements in Hong Kong. Jaya Ranee (2002) who has conducted a study on print advertisements in Malaysia also found that slimming advertisement conveyed the message that in order to be regarded as beautiful, a woman must be slim.

According to Jeffries (2007), 'perfection' is one of the most common messages found in the promotional texts she examined. She states that the ideology of perfection and youthfulness advised the readers to work towards achieving a 'perfect and youthful' body through various methods such as slimming or plastic surgery. Jeffries (2007) asserts that majority of the adjectives employed in women's magazines are in the form of superlatives e.g. *perfect, amazing, gorgeous* and *ideal*. Similarly, in this present study, under the category of positive lexicalization, positive adjectives such as *ideal* and *perfect* are commonly used by the advertisers to depict female body shapes that meet the prescribed criteria of slim, shapely and firm. Adjectives such as *great, fabulous, stunning, picture-perfect, alluring* and *appealing* are also found in the promotional texts to illustrate women who have the slim, shapely and firm figure. Therefore, by employing these positive adjectives to describe women who possess the

‘ideal’ body shape, the advertisers are actually encouraging women to pursue the ideal body shape because it is an attribute that is highly esteemed by the society.

The data reveals that ‘positive association’ is a strategy widely employed by the advertisers to attach positive qualities and values to the ideal female form. Some of the positive associations used by the promotional texts are self-esteem/confidence, beauty/sex appeal; success/achievement; health; happiness; object of desire; sense of pride and peace of mind. Jeffries (2007) also points out that slimming texts have the tendency to equate the slimming achievement with happiness and success. On the similar note, Jaya Ranee (2002) asserts that slimming advertisements often convey the message that when a woman has a slim body, she will possess self-confidence. These positive associations are ideological in nature as they are the qualities popularized by the consumerist culture to encourage women to spend their money to advance the multi billion dollar slimming and beauty industry.

5.3 Patriarchal Society and the Discursive Practice of Advertising

The data analyses reveal that promotional texts rely heavily on negative lexicalization, negative labelling, positive lexicalization and positive association to construct the non-ideal and the ideal body image for Malaysian women. The ideal body image for women is therefore a social construction by the authority in power. In this case, the advertisers who fund the media space are the authority who holds the power to construct the versions of reality to serve their economic interest.

By using Fairclough’s (1995a) three dimensional framework, this study shows that the social practice and discursive practice of the society play a part in the production of such texts in the Malaysian society. The patriarchal culture in Malaysia

has to a certain extent moulded the beauty ideology and belief system of the Malaysian women. Malaysian women are also very familiar with the media messages that portray an ideal woman as one who possesses a slim and shapely figure. This type of media messages was once originated from the Hollywood entertainment industry where patriarchy is being practised. Globalization has also 'flooded' the Malaysian society with media messages that propagate the thin ideal for women. Likewise, Albani (2005) affirms that magazine advertising constructs woman's ideal body shape according to the dominant patriarchal beauty standards in the society. Jeffries (2007) also points out that her data repeatedly imply that it is important for women not to be overweight so that they can appear sexually attractive to men.

As a result of internalizing the constructed beauty ideal, copywriters from advertising agencies will naturally produce promotional texts that advocate the thin ideal. Likewise, readers of the print advertisements are also not able to easily recognize the ideology of the thin ideal in the promotional texts as they have been immersed in the culture that celebrates thinness as the ideal beauty. Due to the 'background knowledge' on what constitutes an ideal body image for women, the strategies of lexicalization employed in the promotional texts will be considered by the Malaysian society as 'non-ideological common sense' (Fairclough 1995a: 28).

Through this study, the researcher has examined the various lexical items employed by the promotional texts to unearth the opaque ideology on female ideal body image in the print media in Malaysia. This study also reveals that the discourse of advertising has the power to shape the social and at the same time it is socially shaped. (Fairclough, 1995b).

5.4 Suggestion for Future Research

It is hoped that this study in a way has achieved its aim to create awareness among Malaysian women to recognize that the media portrayal of the slim ideal is merely a construct. Armed with this awareness, the Malaysian women will be empowered to resist the ideology of the slim ideal.

Future CDA scholars who intend to conduct studies related to women's body image may want to consider analyzing their texts using some of the uncommon tools employed by Jeffries (2007: 17) such as presupposition and implicature. Besides that, a simple survey may also be carried out to gather feedback from the readers to examine whether the readers are able to see beyond the ideological construction of the print advertisements. Survey is a useful triangulation method that will provide insights to the researcher. By conducting a survey, the researcher will be able to ascertain whether the readers accept the thin ideal as truth rather than cultural construct. In this way, the researcher will be able to ascertain whether advertising has become the so called 'ideological state apparatus' (Fairclough 2006a: 87).